

The clear lines of all the various organizations began to blur by the time of the election as the oft-repeated specter of black violence created within the city an edgy armed camp. Some of the highest ranking Democratic Party leaders in the county lost sight of some peripheral activities because, as Rountree admitted, they were “busy in other activities.”<sup>54</sup> As spokesman for the Democrats, Waddell proclaimed in late October that “we are going to protect our firesides and our loved ones or we will die in the attempt.”<sup>55</sup>

For the purposes of organized protection for homes, women, and children, white leaders divided the city into sections along ward lines. Following military chain of command structures, a man was then selected to serve as ward captain in each of the five wards. Hayden indicated that two of the Secret Nine, E. S. Lathrop and P. B. Manning, were established as contacts for the ward captains to communicate with other leaders unknown to the captains. Further, each ward captain selected a lieutenant to command individual blocks. Lieutenants reported daily to the ward captain the number of armed men they represented and the numbers of women, children, and invalids that would need protection. The lieutenants then received orders to organize the men of each block for regular patrols. An outsider commented that the city “might have been preparing for a siege instead of an election” because men of all backgrounds had “brushed aside the great principles that divide parties and individuals and stood together as one man.”<sup>56</sup> One method used

by the Citizen’s Patrol for identification was a white handkerchief tied to the left arm.<sup>57</sup> Democratic leader Thomas W. Strange wrote to Benehan Cameron of Durham that the city was “like an armed camp” because of nightly street patrols.<sup>58</sup> A reporter for the *Richmond Times* visited the city just before the election and attended a meeting at the home of “a leading citizen” who was involved in a conference with ward captains. The reporter explained that the men, some of whom were Confederate veterans, had “every detail arranged” and were not “hot-headed boys” but, instead, “the most prominent men in the city who have resolved that there shall be no further negro rule.” The reporter took pains to point out the differences between the organized

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discovered “murmurings” of Vigilance Committees at that early stage. Chief of Police Melton testified that guns were carried on the street during the campaign and that armed men were posted on every corner in the city all night for a few days before the election. *Hayden, WLI*, 66, 70; Thomas Clawson, “The Wilmington Race Riot in 1898, Recollections and Memories” Louis T. Moore Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; “Minutes of the Organizational Meeting of the Association of Members of the Wilmington Light Infantry,” December 14, 1905, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill; Henry West, “The Race War in North Carolina,” *The Forum*, January 1899, 579; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 285; Jim Worth to Josephine, November 16, 1898, James Spencer Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection.; *Contested Election Case*, 360; James Cowan, “The Wilmington Race Riot.”

<sup>57</sup> Jack Metts, November 9, 1898, Hinsdale Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.

<sup>58</sup> Historian Jerome McDuffie observed that the Vigilance Committee was associated mainly with leading businessmen and property owners, resulting in less white supremacy rhetoric. Further, he noted that they did not hold rallies, openly brandish weapons to intimidate, and that discussions of this group were “tempered” with a degree of “moderate paternalism.” McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 621; Thomas Strange to Benehan Cameron, November 16, 1898, Benehan Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

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<sup>54</sup> Rountree, “Memorandum.”

<sup>55</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, October 29, 1898.

<sup>56</sup> It is unclear as to when the patrols began. James Cowan, editor of the *Wilmington Dispatch*, claimed that the patrols took place for a year, but most other accounts indicate that the patrols began in the period immediately preceding the election. In August, a correspondent of the *News and Observer* visited the city to investigate claims of “negro domination” and